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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000326

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [UNHCR](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO THE
PROTECTION CLUSTER

REF: A. STATE 17135

- [1](#)B. ABIDJAN 293
- [1](#)C. 06 ABIDJAN 1245
- [1](#)D. 06 ABIDJAN 838

Classified By: NICK HILGERT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Abidjan-based Refugee Coordinator (RefCoord) and Regina Davis, USAID/OFDA's Principal Regional Advisor for West Africa (PRA), met in Abidjan with UN-OCHA, other UN agencies, NGOs, and donor Embassies to discuss opinions on UNHCR's handling of its Protection Cluster responsibility to date, as well as its proposed activities on behalf of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cote d'Ivoire. RefCoord and PRA also stressed to UNHCR that it needs to re-engage on promotion of Liberian repatriation leading up to the June 2007 deadline. There is general consensus that the Protection Cluster's objectives remain vague and that UNHCR should improve its working relationship with its UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners.
End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The Abidjan-based Refugee Coordinator (RefCoord) and Regina Davis, USAID/OFDA's Principal Regional Advisor for West Africa (PRA), met in Abidjan with UN-OCHA, other UN agencies, NGOs, and donor Embassies to discuss opinions of UNHCR's handling of its Protection Cluster responsibility to date, as well as its proposed activities on behalf of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cote d'Ivoire. RefCoord and PRA also met with UNHCR to deliver the joint message (ref. A) that UNHCR needs to re-engage on promoting Liberian repatriation leading up to the June 2007 deadline.

Other Donors Upset with UNHCR Approach

[1](#)3. (C) RefCoord and PRA first met with representatives from the Embassies of Canada, Germany, Norway, and Sweden at the U.S. Embassy on March 12. There was a general consensus that the role of the Protection Cluster in Cote d'Ivoire, more than one year after Jan Egeland's visit, was not well defined and that the objectives behind UNHCR's proposed IDP activities in Cote d'Ivoire remain vague. Participants also agreed that UNHCR's confrontational and independent style appeared to discount other organizations that have been working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cote d'Ivoire for many years. Kerstin Cisse, the Representative for the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) based in Dakar, described Saber Azam, the UNHCR Representative, as a "free electron" and that he had alienated many of his UN

and NGO colleagues.

14. (C) Kjetil Schie, Embassy of Norway, complained of UNHCR's authoritarian approach to working with NGOs and confirmed that although Norway would continue to support the Norwegian Refugee Committee (NRC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Cote d'Ivoire, they did not plan to contribute to UNHCR's IDP project. RefCoord explained PRM's concern that UNHCR's promotional work on Liberian repatriation had suffered recently as it had turned most of its attention to IDPs, and described the PRM and OFDA demarche with UNHCR in Geneva (ref. A). PRA added that UNHCR was possibly creating unreasonable expectations among IDPs and government agencies through its repeated promises in the national media "to take care of IDPs" in Cote d'Ivoire, which could have negative repercussions on UNHCR if donor resources are not forthcoming.

Message Communicated to Acting Humanitarian Coordinator

15. (U) RefCoord, PRA, and the SIDA representative spoke to Youssouf Oomar, Acting Humanitarian Coordinator (UNICEF), to convey some of the concerns expressed during our meeting on the Protection Cluster. Oomar explained that he and Kazimiro Rudolf-Jocondo, Head of UN-OCHA, are working on the terms of reference (TOR) for the Protection Cluster, together with UNHCR, and that he hopes the new TOR will allow the UN Country Team to refocus its efforts. However, Oomar described a very different role for the Protection Cluster (stating it should focus on coordinating operational agencies working on IDP issues) than the objectives outlined in the draft TOR he shared with us. He also believes the Protection Network, already in existence for two years, should continue on as a technical advisor and that Clusters were only created

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to address emergency situations.

16. (U) During a larger meeting with members of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Coordination Committee (IAHCC), Azam presented the draft TOR and again referred to UNHCR's IDP activities as directly linked to four "gaps" identified in IDP protection that served as the basis for their Cluster activities: profiling of the IDP caseload; documentation and protection monitoring for IDPs; resolution of property rights; and improving coordination with public officials. PRA pointed out that these gaps appeared in contradiction with the objectives of their role as Protection Cluster lead, which aimed for a broader coordination of protection needs for both IDPs and civilian populations. Jacques Seurt, Chief of Mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), also mentioned that other organizations had, in fact, already been working on documentation issues prior to the UNHCR proposal.

Saber Rattling

17. (SBU) RefCoord and PRA met with Azam on two further occasions to discuss progress on the June 2007 deadline for Liberian refugee repatriation and to express our concern over progress in implementing the Protection Cluster in Cote d'Ivoire. Regarding refugees, Azam assured RefCoord and PRA that UNHCR has been active promoting Liberian repatriation. However, the figures he shared with RefCoord on UNHCR convoys in 2006 showed an overall decrease in the number of persons returning since his arrival. Azam's staff outlined a promotion campaign strategy and shared relevant documents with RefCoord (see also Ref. B for UNHCR progress on Liberian repatriation).

18. (SBU) Concerning IDPs and UNHCR's Protection Cluster, PRA asked Azam bluntly to describe what UNHCR had achieved since taking on the Cluster lead in September and questioned whether or not a Protection Cluster was even necessary at

this point. Azam insisted that much improvement had been made and that attention to IDPs was included in the recently signed Ouagadougou Peace Agreement. PRA pointed out that since spring 2006, OCHA's Protection Network had organized several activities that focused on IDP rights and the government's responsibility to meet IDP protection needs, all activities that enjoyed strong participation from government, UN agencies, and NGO partners. PRA also pointed out that the Ministry of Solidarity has had a return and reintegration project in place for IDPs since at least last July, before Azam's arrival. PRA stressed that UNHCR needs to stay focused on more immediate needs and demonstrate concrete success before taking on additional activities. PRA stated that the most urgent protection issues are in western Cote d'Ivoire and not in Grand Bassam, where UNHCR is conducting its IDP profiling exercise.

Fitting a Cluster Into a Network

¶9. (U) The UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) established in September 2005 nine "cluster leads" to help identify gaps in humanitarian response and to ensure greater predictability and accountability. At the country level, the IASC's November 2006 Guidelines state that the "cluster approach" is also supposed to raise the standards of partnership in all areas of activity. Although not limited to situations of internal displacement, the cluster approach is supposed to improve the quality of response in such situations. Although UN Country Teams are encouraged to turn to organizations with global cluster responsibilities to lead country level responses in setting up clusters, they are not required to do so and may take advantage of existing capacities of those organizations already present on the ground. The IASC identified three cluster leads for UNHCR in conflict situations: Protection, Camp Management, and Emergency Shelter.

¶10. (U) Much of the confusion in Cote d'Ivoire relates to UNHCR's effort to establish a Protection Cluster alongside the pre-existing UN-OCHA managed "Protection Network." The Protection Network has been organizing IDP related activities in Cote d'Ivoire since the spring of 2006, drawing on the support and participation of governmental bodies, UNHCR, and other organizations. However, following Azam's arrival in Cote d'Ivoire in July 2006, UNHCR formally announced the

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establishment of what UNHCR and the UN Country Team called the "IDP Cluster," and UNHCR thus proceeded to define a series of IDP protection and assistance activities that in many cases were already being implemented by other agencies. This led to often acrimonious discussions between UNHCR and these same agencies. However, in December 2006, UNHCR, UN-OCHA, and other international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) agreed to redefine UNHCR's protection role and established what they now refer to as, the "Protection Cluster," thus incorporating the Protection Network into their activities. As a result, depending on who you talk to, the Protection Cluster was established in either August, September or December 2006, or in January 2007. Either way, the new "Protection Cluster" will have a much different focus than UNHCR's limited view of its role in September of 2006.

Comment

¶11. (C) Despite UNHCR's best intentions, the Protection Cluster in Cote d'Ivoire appears to be in disarray. There is no direct link between UNHCR's proposed IDP activities and its management of the Protection Cluster as currently conceived, and confusion still reigns over the objectives of this Cluster more than one year after Jan Egeland declared Cote d'Ivoire to be a "protection crisis." The fundamental reasons for this confusion cannot be placed wholly on UNHCR's

doorstep; the basis for establishing the Protection Cluster in Cote d'Ivoire (Note: this is the only Cluster that was established in Cote d'Ivoire. End note.) is weak and this decision pre-dates Azam's arrival. But Azam's own difficulties working with his UN and NGO colleagues have clearly exacerbated the situation. Those organizations already working with IDPs in Cote d'Ivoire continue to conduct their activities as before and, unfortunately, UNHCR is not really involved in these activities to ensure a protection element. In the meantime, UNHCR's promotion efforts with Liberian refugees has shown renewed vigor in March (ref. B) and Azam and other members of the UN Country Team have committed to improve coordination under the Protection Cluster. Progress on this point still remains to be seen.

Hooks